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Making the Academic Transition to College

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Making the academic transition to college

As well as all the other changes and challenges you may encounter in making the transition to college, the learning environment is different. Lecturers will use words like “independent learning,” and “self-directed learning”. What does this mean? Basically, you will be supported to take charge of your own learning. Often lecturers will not ‘chase’ you for assessment materials if you do not submit, or wonder why you did not appear for an in-class test. You’ll be encouraged to move beyond rote learning and to start thinking around the material and the subject area. To step up to this independent learning, the following are important.

Attend your orientation. This is, by far, the best start you can give yourself. You’ll meet your tutors and the lecturing team, and most importantly, the other students. You will be better equipped to hit the ground running when lectures commence.

Knowing your programme and your modules is crucial. Maybe you didn’t put as much time into researching your course prior to selection. Now’s the time to get your facts straight. What exactly will you have to complete in first-year? How many modules? Is there a mandatory threshold that you must meet in all/certain modules? Can you gain exemptions in some modules due to prior study?

Attend everything - this may be the deal-breaker. Attend all your lectures and tutorials, even if there is no stipulation or weighting on attendance. You will build good learning patterns and know what is required. Much information won’t be posted on a virtual learning environment.

Manage the gaps: You may be timetabled for 35 hours per week, or 14, depending on what you’re studying. So a lecture may be timetabled for 9-11am, and you may be free then until 3pm. How will you fill this? Of course, the lecturers will hope that you will head for the library and engage in that ‘self-directed learning’! But there’s nothing wrong with hanging out with your fellow-classmates soaking up the college experience.

Your first year will be so much richer if you engage in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. Most colleges offer opportunities for you to volunteer, or work with communities (e.g. D.I.T.’s “Students Learning with Communities”). Jump into everything you can. If your programme is vocationally oriented, e.g. tourism or events, start thinking early on about internship and career opportunities.

Approaching your work in college is different. You need to build the academic skills and literacy skills to support that. Many colleges will help you in this regard, either informally or formally. In D.I.T. an initiative called “Get Smart”! helps students to apply information literacy skills and writing skills to their academic modules, as well as workshops to help them engage. Academic learning is so much more than ‘googling’, so make friends with your librarian.

Most of all - Engage - There is no secret formula for a successful transition to first-year - what you put in, you will get back.

Top tips for a successful first-year

ATTEND, ENGAGE, SUBMIT

- 1. Attend the induction/orientation**
- 2. Turn up to lectures and tutorials**
- 3. One hour timetabled requirement generally equates to an additional two hours of your own input.**
- 4. Get to know your tutor – they can help you with problems settling in or point you in the right direction.**
- 5. Submit everything you have to submit. It might be only 5 or 10% of the module, but you may not proceed to second year without it.**
- 6. If you are having doubts, talk to someone. All universities and colleges are now well equipped with careers, counselling, and retention officers.**
- 7. Engage – with your programme, other students and your lecturing team. Create allies for yourself.**
- 8. If you have personal circumstances (bereavement etc.), special needs or a learning disability, make sure you get registered early. It will be considered in your results.**
- 9. Love your librarian**
- 10. ENJOY . All of the above are important in a successful academic transition, but they will also contribute to ensuring the college experience will stand to you and stay with you.**